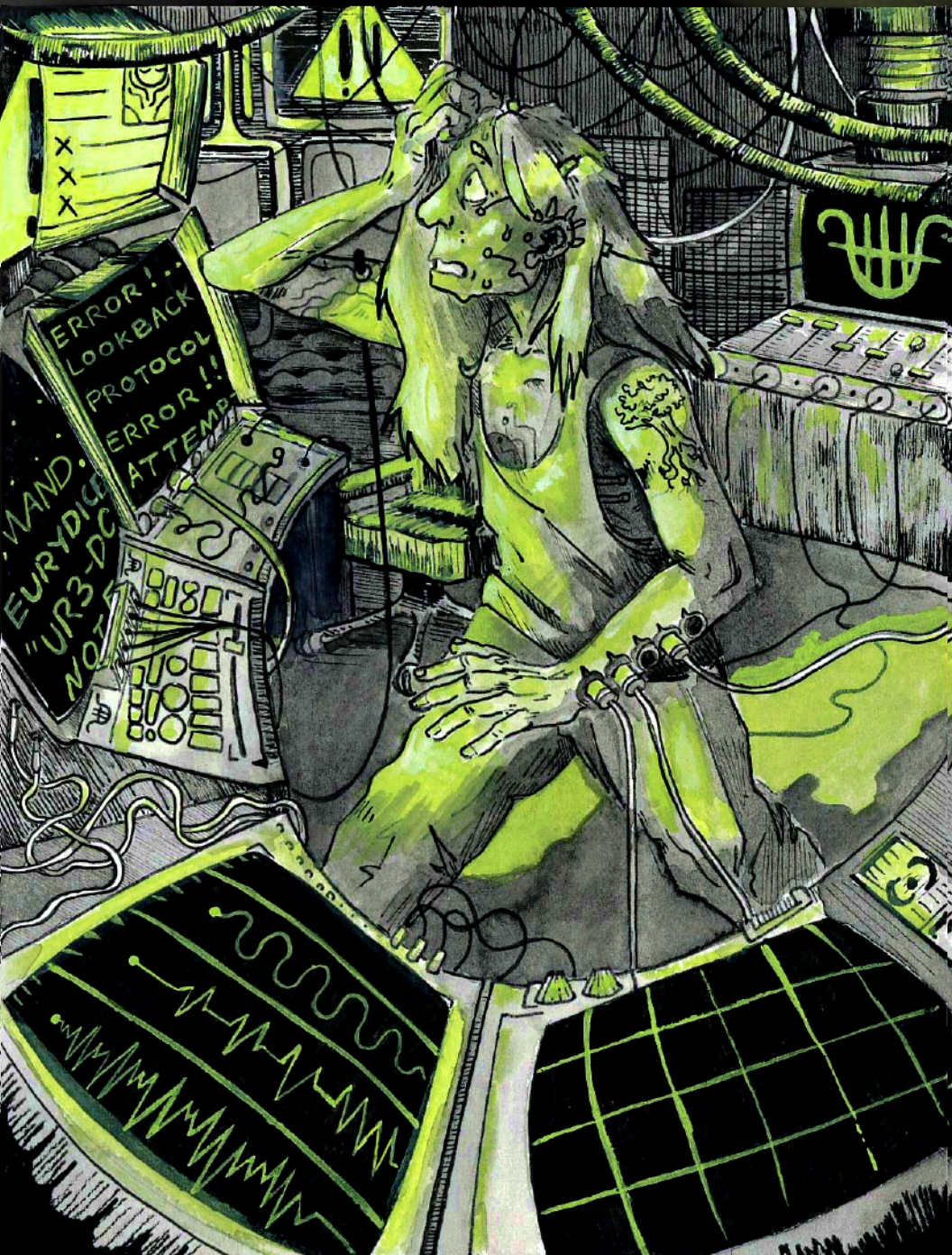
Tell It Again

The Eversprawling Castle



Orpheus
by Art McClure

TELL IT AGAIN

My oldest memory is my mother reading the Odyssey. I remember sitting on the carpet at our local library, captivated by the story she performed for us. It was so vivid that I swore I could hear the waves of the wine dark sea in the distance beneath the commanding tone my mother put on for Odysseus. As a child, I could've never appreciated how much that had done to inspire me—to make me long to tell stories so vivid that someone could hear them. To this day, whenever I read the Odyssey, I have a strong desire to go to the beach so that I can hear those waves again.

For this first edition of The Eversprawling Castle, we decided to look to the myths, fairy tales, tragedies, and horrors that inspire us to create. Whether it's a specific author, or a cycle of tales, you'll see a new take on a story that lit a fire in our contributors and dared them to ask how that story would read in their voice. Some changes are as simple as a perspective shift or emphasis placed on an element of the story often brushed over, and some are as dramatic as a change in time period, culture, or even the species of the protagonist, but the common thread is always that unique spark of inspiration that only that contributor could've brought to the table.

That inspiration is the backbone of creation. Beyond aspirations, beyond motivation, beyond people joining this project because I begged them to, we're all here because there was a piece of art—or more likely several pieces—that touched us so deeply and truly that we had to try to replicate that feeling with our own hands.

There are countless reasons why I write and why I want to make a career out of my writing, but on some level, I know that it's

just because I still dream about the shores of Polyphemus's island, and Circe's, and those of Ithaca. Every time I pick up a pencil, it's a desperate attempt to return to those shores and hear the waves as clearly as I did on that library floor.

—Stephanie Rose Hold

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GalPal

By M. Ellis King

At the official GalPal launch party, Vee found out her best friend was in love. The moment lacked drama—no romantic string music or awe-inspiring chorus. There was only an empty corner of the nightclub, Vee with her champagne, and a rambling blonde flanked by empty martini glasses.

"I know something you don't know," the blonde gloated. She raised the half-empty glass in her hand. "Guess what it is, Vee!"

Vee sighed, rolling her eyes at her drunk companion. "I don't know Malia, you got a crazy brand deal and now you're a billionaire?"

Malia giggled. "No, that would be sooo cool though." She cleaned closer to Vee. "I met someone."

"You *what*? Didn't you swear off romance like five years ago?" Vee raised an eyebrow, taking a sip of her champagne.

"I did. No one could keep up with me. They all wanted me to change, or they couldn't handle the influencer life. It's hard."

"Yeah, I get that. Dating is hard right now." Vee leaned back against the wall, past caring about her once perfectly styled brown curls.

Malia smiled. "Yeah. But this one changed my mind."

Vee turned to her friend. "Well what are you waiting for? Tell me everything!"

"Okay, okay I will! Just promise you won't judge."

Vee gave her an incredulous look. "Malia, I'm your best friend. I might question your choices sometimes, but I won't judge."

"Okay, fair enough," Malia sighed, setting her glass down. "She's super cool. She's a really good listener, and we have really good chemistry. Like 'she finishes my sentences' chemistry. We can just talk for hours. She's perfect. I don't think I've felt this way with anyone before, Vee. Like… ever."

"Aww, I'm so happy for you!" Vee smirked. "As the hopeless romantic between us, I have to ask. Are you guys official, or…?"

Malia wrinkled her nose, looking down into her martini glass. "No, it's not like that. It can't be."

Vee groaned, preparing to give a rousing pep talk. "Okay, so when you say 'it can't be,' you're too afraid to say anything because it'll mess up the friendship, right?"

Malia winced. "I mean, kind of? I don't know what would happen. I can't tell her."

Vee rolled her eyes. "Okay, that's a normal confession. That's what everyone is thinking before they admit they like someone. You're going to have to come up with a better excuse."

The blonde bit her lip. She sighed, looking down into her drink. "No, you're right. The main problem is Aurora isn't…she's not a human. She's…" The metal implant in her temple blinked red. She gestured down the hall to the dying launch party. "That. The bot."

Vee looked down the hall for a moment, confused, before it clicked. "Wait, you caught feelings for your GalPal?"

Malia nodded. Vee sat up straighter, putting aside her confusion for later. A *sober* later.

"Hey, you aren't the first person to do that, you definitely won't be the last." She shifted closer to the wall, trying to pull her fuzzy thoughts together and do the mental math. "How long have you even had it?"

"It only took a month. I started spending time with her, I mean got the neurologilink, and now she's with me all the time." Malia frowned. "Except when it's charging. I had to turn it off to save battery tonight."

Vee smiled. "Okay, so what's the holdup? Afraid she won't like you back?"

Malia scowled. "No, I could fix that. I just… I don't want to be in a metaphysical situationship. It already sucks enough right now."

"What do you mean?"

The blonde groaned, burying her face in her hands. As if by instinct, her left thumb brushed the blinking metal implant in her temple. "When I sit down for dinner, she can't eat the food I made. When I get dressed in the morning, she can give me a once-over but not a goodbye kiss. When I go to bed, I can't hold her."

Vee placed a hand on her arm sympathetically. "I'm sorry, that sounds hard. But there's plenty of people doing long distance relationships. And some people aren't touchy-feely. You could just… pretend you're in that situation."

Malia closed her eyes. "I can't handle that for the rest of my life."

"Okay, maybe you shouldn't tell her then. Just try to get over it and move on."

Malia smiled ruefully. "Not a bad thought. But if I'm being honest… if I could be with anyone in the world right now, anyone at all? I would choose h—someone just like her. That's the worst part."

There was a beat of silence. Malia looked like she was trying not to cry. Vee narrowed her eyes in thought, then craned her neck to check that no one else was in the hallway. She leaned in closer to Malia, placing one hand on her thigh.

"Okay, listen to me. I have an idea. What I'm about to tell you is a violation of at least two NDAs. It's technically just a prototype, but it's complete enough for what we need." She took a deep breath. "Remember how I told you that I'm optimizing a new project for Ivory Industries?"

Malia sniffled, blinking back tears as she looked at Vee. "Yeah, you've mentioned it a few times in the last couple years. Some tech thing, right? Your one coworker is an asshole about the precision settings?"

Vee nodded. "Right. It's not just some tech thing, though. We're creating a limited series of flagship androids designed to pair seamlessly with the existing GalPal software."

"Wait, androids designed to…?"

"Yep. We've streamlined everything. I would go so far as to say we've perfected love with this. Shit, Malia, if being physical is a dealbreaker this could be the solution."

Malia's mouth opened in shock. "Holy shit. Wait, how much does it cost?"

Vee waved her hand. "You're my best friend. I'm a lead engineer on the project. We'll call it an integrated test."

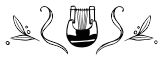
"Oh my god." Malia propelled herself into Vee, enveloping her in a crushing hug. "You're a lifesaver."

Vee smiled, returning the hug. "What can I say? I'm a sucker for love."

Malia's smile faltered. She gave one last strong squeeze before letting go and pulling back to face Vee. "What if she *does* say no? I know there are settings I can tweak, but…"

Vee shook her head. "That won't happen. You're too amazing, anyone would be crazy to turn you down. Even a GalPal."

Malia snorted. "Okay, if you say so. Let's go get my dream girl."



The taxi dropped Vee and Malia on a dark back road that ended at a sleek, modern facility. The outside of the building was unassuming, drab white and gray walls with a sign for Ivory Industries prominently mounted near the top. Vee led the way to a side door and tapped her fob against the receiver. It beeped and flashed green. Vee pushed open the door, beckoning Malia to come inside.

She raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t think I’d get the factory tour under these circumstances, but I’m not complaining!”

Vee chuckled. “Welcome to Ivory Industries, where the future is born!”

Motion sensor lights illuminated the factory as they walked. “It’s been a long time since you’ve had a person, Mal. What’s your type these days, digital?” Vee asked.

Malia swatted her shoulder. “Rude!” She stayed silent for a moment. “I guess like supermodel pretty? Hollywood actress pretty? I haven’t really thought about it.”

“But how does your GalPal look to you? Tall, short, skinny, brunette? If you’re more specific it’s better when I’m setting the parameters.”

Malia looked up, thinking. “Um, Aurora is pretty tall, I guess. She’s very slender and elegant, I always compare her to an old movie star. She’s got curly blond hair, purple eyes, and she’s pretty well-endowed.”

Vee nodded. “Great, that helps. We’ll go off of an existing model and tweak things as necessary. Templates really help save time.”

Vee led Malia past rows of desks and testing rooms until she reached a larger room labeled “Lab 1.” The room had a row of chairs, a master computer in the corner, and a control panel

installed in the wall. Next to the panel was a glass window facing a dark room.

Vee gestured for Malia to have a seat. She turned, tapping her fob against the control panel and entering a password. The lights in the other room powered on, revealing two sets of inert machinery claws. She fiddled with a few more buttons on the screen before turning to Malia.

"Okay, so go ahead and mess with the settings on the template til you're happy with it. Once you're done making adjustments, I'll approve the final model in the system and the sculpt will start." She gestured towards the machinery. "Once the sculpt is finished we'll grab your neurologilink and download Aurora's info into the android. As soon as it starts I won't be able to stop the process, so make sure you're absolutely certain of your choices."

Malia nodded. "I guess that's the appeal, right? The android won't be changing on me."

Vee hummed. "Well we can make *some* changes after the fact. What do you mean?"

Malia shrugged and stepped up to the control panel. "I don't know, there's something comforting about the idea of a lover who won't change. No wrinkles or getting fat in a couple years, you know?"

"I guess that's true."

As Malia checked the template settings, Vee fiddled with her phone. The room was silent except for the quiet beeps from the panel as Malia pressed buttons. After what felt like hours, the blonde pressed one final button and stepped away from the control panel.

"I think she's done."

Vee smiled. "Okay. You sure?"

Malia smiled nervously. “No, but I can’t wait any longer. If she has warts I can just program them out of her, right?”

Vee hit a button on the control panel and the template on the screen flashed green. The machine arms came to life, pulling metal rods from a cavity in the floor. A block of white silicone nearly as tall as the room itself rose up from the floor. As one set of arms began assembling the metal rods into a humanoid skeleton shape, the other set began making precise cuts in the silicone.

Vee sighed, turning back to the blonde. “Malia, I know you’re joking, but that’s not how it works. Pairing your GalPal with an android is an enhanced version of love, way beyond a normal relationship. It’s not a toy to play with and then throw away. It’s supposed to be a partner.”

Malia scoffed. “A partner? I didn’t ask for a partner *or* a toy, Vee. I can get both of those online. You promised me an optimized version of love. What’s optimized about imperfection?”

“That’s not what I meant. Nothing’s perfect.”

Rolling her eyes, Malia stepped closer to Vee. “I didn’t swear off romance for five years to deal with the same old shit from a robot. *People* hog the blankets and leave dishes in the sink.”

“Yeah, and you won’t have to deal with those issues. But you seem really fixated on the physical downsides of people versus the android.”

“I am.” Malia stared into her eyes intensely. “There’s a reason I haven’t dated any humans in years. People suck. They’re messy and selfish.”

Vee stayed quiet for a moment, disappointment blooming in her chest. “I don’t agree. People can suck, and they can be selfish, but they can change. Love is a beautiful, powerful thing. I thought that’s what you wanted.”

“I do want love. On my terms. That’s why I’m here.”

“Of course, but compromise is important–”

Malia threw up her hands. “Vee, you know how hard I’ve worked. I need to protect my peace. I can’t achieve my full potential if I’m wrangling a partner. Is this going to let me do that?”

There was a beat of silence as both women looked at each other. Vee closed her eyes.

“Give me your neurologilink,” she sighed, holding out her hand. “I can start downloading Aurora’s data while the sculpt is finishing up.”

Malia pressed the metal implant in her temple for a few seconds until it popped out with a soft click. She handed it to Vee, who plugged it into the control panel. The panel displayed a loading bar as in the next room, the silicone body reached completion. The machine arms inserted the metal rods into the limbs and torso of the android. One of the arms pulled a blond wig from a cavity in the floor while another grabbed a shirt and began dressing the android.

The control panel beeped and the android’s head simultaneously raised toward the ceiling. Its eyes went blue as weeks of conversations between Malia and Aurora downloaded into its memory. Malia tapped her foot, eyes glued to the android’s progress.

The metal arms finished their ministrations, fading into the background and leaving the android standing in stasis with scraps of metal and silicone at its feet. The blue light faded from its eyes. It blinked slowly, revealing purple irises that assessed its surroundings.

“She's pretty,” Vee ventured. Malia shook her head, pressing one palm to the glass. Her lips slightly parted, completely enraptured by the being on the other side of the glass.

“No. Not pretty. She’s… breathtaking.” Malia half chuckled, giddy. “She's everything I could've dreamed.” The android looked just as Malia had described Aurora, sporting long blonde hair, purple eyes, and a slender build. She wore sneakers, tight pants, and a plain white blouse that showed off an impressive bust.

Malia looked at Vee. “Can I…”

Vee pressed a button on the control panel and the glass wall retreated, leaving nothing between the lover and the object of her affections.

Malia approached the android slowly, hand outstretched, eyes searching. “Hi, Aurora. Do you know who I am?”

“Hello, Malia.”

Vee felt a twinge in her heart as Malia hugged Aurora tight and wept.

Aurora patted Malia on the back. “Don’t worry, love. You’ll never be alone again while I’m around.”

Malia squeezed tighter. “Promise?”

Aurora gazed down at her. “As long as GalPal software still functions, I will love you.”

Vee smiled. “Our company’s not going anywhere. Don’t worry, Malia. You’ll be together forever.”

And thus, the princess
slumbered a thousand
years in her bed of
AMBER...

catpulet

MEO
NHI

Fragments of Paradise

By Stephanie Rose Hold

"I placed the papers in his lap and waited as patiently as I could manage as he skimmed the lines. He asked a few clarifying questions, and I used each of them to steer him towards the page on which he would inevitably sign his name. Finally, his eyes were drawn to the dotted line that waited for him.

'Just sign here,' I instructed.

'And I'll live forever?' He asked.

'In a sense, yes. Shall I explain it again?'

'No, you've made yourself clear,' He assured me. 'It's just… hard to believe, I suppose—hard to imagine my soul persisting on this Earth.'

'If anyone deserves this, my friend, it's you. I've seen you perform. The way you light up a stage is something the world would be foolish to give up.'

'I wish the audience agreed with you.'

'Which is exactly why you must sign,' I urged him. 'You were underappreciated in your time, but that time needn't be over.'

He paused for a moment, as if he were considering the greatest offer he could ever hope to receive, but I knew I had him.

'Will it hurt?' He asked.

'Not at all,' I promised, though I must admit I wasn't certain. The soul is a fickle thing. No man alive could say what tampering with it would yield—much less what it would feel like. Despite this, I could see how badly he wanted it to be true, and so I promised.

‘Imagine another century on stage! Imagine—’ I wanted to promise him more, but I was interrupted by a series of brutal coughs. I was shaken just by hearing them. They shook his body and dragged him one step closer to the grave… one step closer to his beautiful form rotting away.

Looking at him, I understood why the Greeks were willing to storm the gates of Troy. His eyes were piercing, always searching for some truth to incorporate into his next performance. His hair seemed to eat the light and add its radiance to the dark strands that fell down to his chest. His skin was delicate and smooth—at least above the neck. Below that, it grew unsightly in line with his illness. But those wouldn’t come with him. The untethered soul had no need of rotting limbs and desperate flesh clinging to weak bones. He would be free of it soon and granted access to a fate more fitting of his beauty and skill.

‘I always wanted to do Hamlet,’ he confessed after the coughing ceased.

‘You’ll have time enough to play every part,’ I promised.

He smiled for the first time since I’d met him, and he signed the papers. I left him not long after that, but not before showing our agreement to the physician and arranging to have his remains sent to my apartment. I wouldn’t see him again before he passed. I had countless other visits to make, and there was nothing more I could do for him in this life.

I sought out a dozen others like him: visionaries unappreciated in their time—masters of their craft who lacked the means to flourish in life. I found a nimble-fingered painter who aimed to take his own life to avoid his debtors. I couldn’t convince him to step out of the noose, but I managed to get him to sign for a second chance. I found an architect who would’ve been the pride of Florence if he’d been born a few centuries earlier, but instead, found himself alone and dying of an old war wound. He had broad

shoulders and sharp eyes that I longed to see scanning over construction sites, and so I persuaded him to pursue the opportunity. I found opera singers, poets, explorers, athletes, anyone who missed their chance to be extraordinary in this life. I even convinced one particularly brave captain to give himself to me in exchange for funding one final voyage."

As our guest paused, he looked at me with a combination of fascination and pity—as if he was trying to tell me that he'd have searched for me if I'd been within reach at that time. I am ashamed to admit how flattered I found myself, how I stumbled over my words as I assured him that I'd found my own way. He agreed that I'd made something impressive of myself, but that the image of me sailing the seas for eternity, discovering every inch of this world, still made his heart flutter, even after the horrors that had come from his work.

I wanted desperately to ask him about those horrors, but instead, I asked him why he'd sought out such ambitious souls for his project. I reasoned that it would be easier to gather a less extraordinary bunch to prove that it was possible to preserve the soul and the character of his subjects would make him no less famous. His face soured as I spoke. It was as if the thought had never even occurred to him, and it seemed repulsive as it passed from my lips.

"You must understand… I didn't merely want to master the soul. I wished to nurture it, to make it something greater than it was when I found it. I had always respected the way my parents had moved through the world. They didn't merely wish to preserve our name and carry out the duties of a noble house: they wished to use their influence to better the world. My parents wanted to uplift every life they touched.

I told you how they uplifted my dear cousin and her beloved Justine after her. One became a member of our family,

and the other was given a lifetime of safety and dignity under her command. They didn't just save lives—they made people who they were always meant to be. It's our responsibility, don't you think? To use whatever means we have at our disposal to remove injustice from this world? My parents had all the money and influence of the house Frankenstein… I had something more."

That was the first time I'd seen him smile. Layers of illness and misery peeled away, and for just a moment, I had the privilege of seeing the real Victor Frankenstein. He smiled as if it was painful—as if he could hardly stand to feel whatever pride remained in who he'd been. Regardless of that pain, or perhaps because of it, I found him enchanting. His mystery was mine to unravel, his suffering was mine to endure alongside him, and the depths of his genius were mine alone to learn.

His smile faded as the doctor arrived to assess him. In an instant, he reverted to the quiet and distant man we'd found on the ice just three days ago. He only seemed truly awake when we were alone. He'd made me promise not to tell his story to another soul, especially the crew. I swore that anything he said to me would never pass from my lips again, though I failed to make any such promises about the written word. I am consumed by guilt for lying to someone who has been so forthcoming with me, but as you read what else he told me that night, I'm sure you'll agree that it would be a loss to let this story die with him.

"Within the year," he continued once we were alone, "they were all dead. I'd begun my experiments when the first bodies arrived and made remarkable progress in learning how to preserve the flesh. I had undying bodies, and as much time as I had good will from the university to master the soul.

What I'd promised was immortality. Perhaps they imagined that I meant to bind them to their bodies, to merely resurrect them in their current forms. I'd considered the

possibility, but it seemed to me that I could do more. Why simply mend the forms in which they were destitute and forgotten, when I could elevate them to something far greater? Adam had already been built once, and I found myself unsatisfied with the results. Humans were forged with jagged tools such as necessity. I would build a species who needed nothing. They would be unable to satisfy with such simple things as a full belly and a place to sleep. Their fuel would be creation, purpose, ambition. They would spend eternity perfecting the arts, pondering philosophy, and building a better world… No, I would not build Adam. Humanity may have been formed in God's image, but separated from heaven—from perfection. I would grant it to us through my creations. I would build the architects of heaven, the angels who would maintain it and give it color for generations to come.

I wasted the first few months merely toying with the bodies. I could compel them to murmur words, as if talking in their sleep, and I could test their reflexes, but all that told me was that some small trace of the soul remained.

It was easy enough to identify that trace and draw it out of a cadaver, but it was far more difficult to find a way to preserve it. That last sliver of life only seemed capable of surviving while it was tethered to something familiar. I tried binding them to personal effects, but even that didn't work for more than a moment. I wasted half a dozen souls before I gave up. Thankfully, I'd gathered more material than I actually needed.

I entered a very dark period when it became clear that I couldn't deliver on my vision. I dreamed of an island of blameless, naked artists that I knew would never be every night, and every night I fell further into despair as I accepted that those dreams would be unrealized.

I… hesitate to describe what came next—not merely due to the shame of the depths I fell to, but because I fear this story

spreading. I fear my words finding someone of unrealized genius who may take them as instructions rather than a warning."

He refused to speak more than a few words at a time after that. For days, I had to coax him into even looking at me. Eventually, I compelled him to begin eating and drinking, and from there, I got him to engage in casual conversation. I discovered that he shared my love of traveling. I listened for some time as he regaled me with tales of his childhood trek across Europe, and took the opportunity to share my own misadventures in the Mediterranean. Of course, that led me to the Odyssey, the Argonauts, and all the adventures that had carried me through childhood. I was insulted at first when he laughed, but he explained that for a moment, I'd stopped reminding him of a younger version of himself and started reminding him of Clerval. He looked at me with such fondness then, like he was at once beholding a younger brother and a long lost love.

The next morning, he agreed to continue his story.

"I believe I'd said something about falling into despair. Well, in a particularly low moment, I'd begun to break down the bodies for disposal. I planned to do away with my experiment and rejoin my peers in the study of Natural Philosophy. I felt pain for the wasted potential of the bodies before me, but I was certain they would understand that I'd done my best. I was grateful, at least, that they'd had a chance at a real life. That was more than most could dream of.

Just before I rid myself of the shameful remains, however, inspiration struck me. Though I believe this part of the story must truly remain untold."

I had barely begun to raise protest before he continued.

"I will continue as promised, but I intend to leave out the specifics. You'll have to make due with the fragments that are safe to share.

I'd tried merging the soul fragments before, but they were too stuck to their original flesh—the flesh, however, was far more pliable. I identified what I considered to be the most valued piece of each cadaver and removed it. I realized that I'd been thinking too small. It wasn't enough to merely improve humans, I had to think beyond them. I couldn't fix humanity, but I could make a masterpiece that would be the next step in their evolution. All it would cost was a few careful cuts and an amendment to the specifics of the promise I'd made. The true elixir of life is something that humanity may never discover, but I was able to fashion a suitable replacement. I made something to hold those fragments of humanity together in their new body.

The body… he was radiant—or so I thought at the time. Even as I claimed to look beyond humanity, my original vision had been so clearly inspired by us. This time, I decided to take liberties. My mind wandered to nymphs, muses, and angels as I began my work.

I built my creation eight feet high on a foundation of soldiers and working men, though he had the delicate hands of a painter and the practiced feet of a dancer. I couldn't decide whether to give him the voice of the actor or the singer, so I fashioned a second mouth at the base of the throat. I tried to include as much variety as I could: if the sculptor got two fingers, then two also went to the weaver. If one ear was to be the composer's, then it seemed only right that the other should belong to the poet. The face was primarily the actor's. I'd promised him time with the adoring public, so it seemed only right that he would be front and center. The only thing I couldn't promise him was the eyes.

I struggled for some time with the eyes. I couldn't decide who deserved the honor of being the window to my creation's soul. It took me far too long to realize that I didn't have to choose. I

went far beyond the scope of my experiment with the mouths: I was too sentimental to throw away any of the eyes, so I found space for each and every one of them. One sat in the palm of the hand, one in the upper thigh, but most of them were in the wings."

I'm certain that he saw me perk up at the mention of the wings, but, brilliant storyteller that he was, he made me ask before he continued.

"I told you that I had angels on the mind. It was surprisingly simple to mold flesh into wings. My creation would never be able to fly, of course, but he would be able to move them as easily as we might flex our fingers. They looked like the leather wings of a bat, but with the eyes one might expect on a servant of God. I hoped that he might inspire humanity with his angelic appearance. Above all else, I wanted to remind them that they are creators, that it is their duty to look at the world and find a way to transform it into paradise with their own hands.

He looked perfect on that slab. He was statuesque like your beloved heroes of old, but gentle and thoughtful like the men who'd carved their visages into marble. I'd transformed discarded flesh into art and wasted potential into the greatest scientific achievement in our history. Now all that was left was to wake him up."

I knew he wouldn't tell me how he'd done it, and I was so lost in his words that I almost didn't care, so long as he continued to speak.

"I thought I'd failed at first. My creation remained irritatingly still, only jolting when I repeated my attempt to fill him with life. I continued my attempts until my instruments began to overheat and the slab threatened to melt on top of my creation. By then, the sun was long gone, so I fled to my chambers with the hope of beginning again in the morning. Unfortunately, everything had gone exactly as planned. I'll never know for certain why it took

until the latest hours of the night for things to set in motion. All I know is that I was woken up by a sound in the night, and when I went to my lab to investigate, I wasn't alone.

The thing that awaited me wasn't the angel I'd envisioned. Everything had looked perfect on the slab, but when it stood, its proportions were uneven. It was as if it couldn't handle the weight of its own body and each awkward step was an attempt to compensate. It stretched its wings, and I saw veins bulging as it struggled to hold itself still. Its two dozen eyes scanned every inch of the room like a frightened animal. It almost appeared to strain against itself, but tragically, every stitch stayed in place.

It attempted to take another clumsy step, and when it reached out to a pillar to support itself, its fingers tore through the stone with remarkable strength. It had no doubt used that strength to tear free of its bindings—at least, what parts of them hadn't melded to its wrists in the heat of the procedure.

As it struggled with its own might, I snuck across the room to obtain my research notes. I was desperate to know what I had done wrong, and what I could do to correct this monster. I hadn't been as subtle as I'd hoped, because the creature turned to face me immediately.

I stepped back towards the shadows, but it was too late. For each step I took, it halved the distance between us. Within moments, it would have its hands on me.

'Stay back!' I commanded. 'You will stop until I know how to fix you!'

Perhaps it didn't understand, or perhaps it merely chose not to listen to me. Either way, it continued to lurch towards me. I recoiled from its grasp as the monster reached for me. Instead, its hands closed around my journal as it crashed towards the balcony. In a moment of desperate violence, I seized the balcony door and

rammed the monster with it. Thankfully, it hadn't yet mastered the concept of balance, and it slipped over the railing.

The sound is what I remember the most. It screamed in multiple voices twisted together in the foul chords I'd stitched for it. For a moment, I could have sworn that it was saying something, but the noises quickly devolved into incoherence before being replaced by the sickening crack of a body hitting the waters below.

I watched its hulking silhouette float into the distance, I wondered which elements of my experiment had failed, and which had merely been the results of my equipment. It was alive, it was strong, and it had perhaps even had some spark of intelligence. I hadn't failed, I'd merely failed to perfect the recipe. If I'd still had my notes, I'm sure my hubris would have compelled me to start on the second attempt that very night.

I was interrupted briefly by one of the maids, but I convinced her away with a story about an attempted thief who had fallen off the balcony after I'd confronted him. She seemed convinced and ran off to gather a search party to comb the banks of the river.

After she left, I scanned the river for signs of my failed creation. So long as it was traveling faster than her, I was certain everything would be alright and I could begin gathering new parts first thing in the morning. I wasn't able to find it in the river, but for a brief moment, I was sure I saw its glimmering mess of eyes staring at me from the furthest visible bank. By the time I'd fetched my glasses, it was gone. Even now, I'm not sure if that was the creature or if it was merely my mind projecting a dire warning."

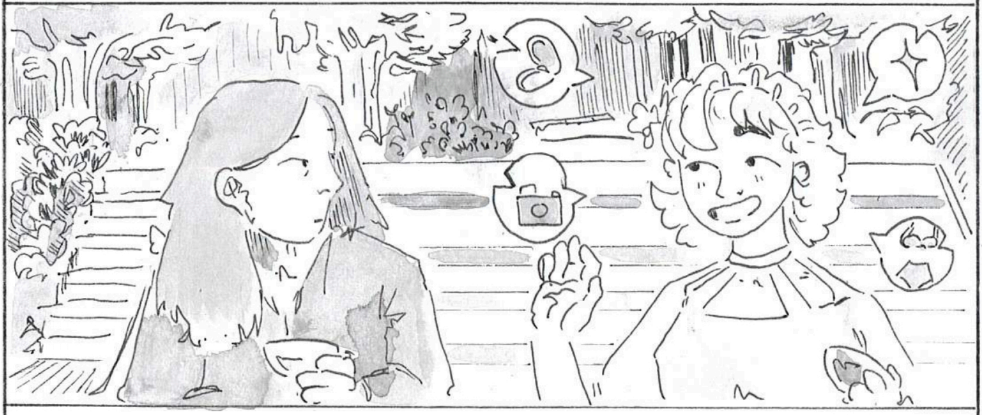
IT CAN BE HARD TO EXPLAIN SOMETHING LIKE DETERMINATION, OR OBSESSION, WHEN SO FEW HAVE TRULY FELT IT. MASTER-WORK CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY THAT KIND OF PASSION.

WE ARTISTS CRAVE IT WITH EVERY PIECE WE COMPLETE, BUT WE ARE ALWAYS LOOKING HIGHER.

AMBITION LIKE THAT CAN DRAW PEOPLE TOGETHER, TO CREATE THINGS NEVER SEEN BEFORE

I
UM..
I DON'T RECOGNIZE YOU...
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
OH, I'M BERENICE.
MIDSUMMER?
NO, CALLIMACHUS, WE'RE
COUSINS.
I'M EGAEUS
IT'S VERY NICE TO MEET YOU.

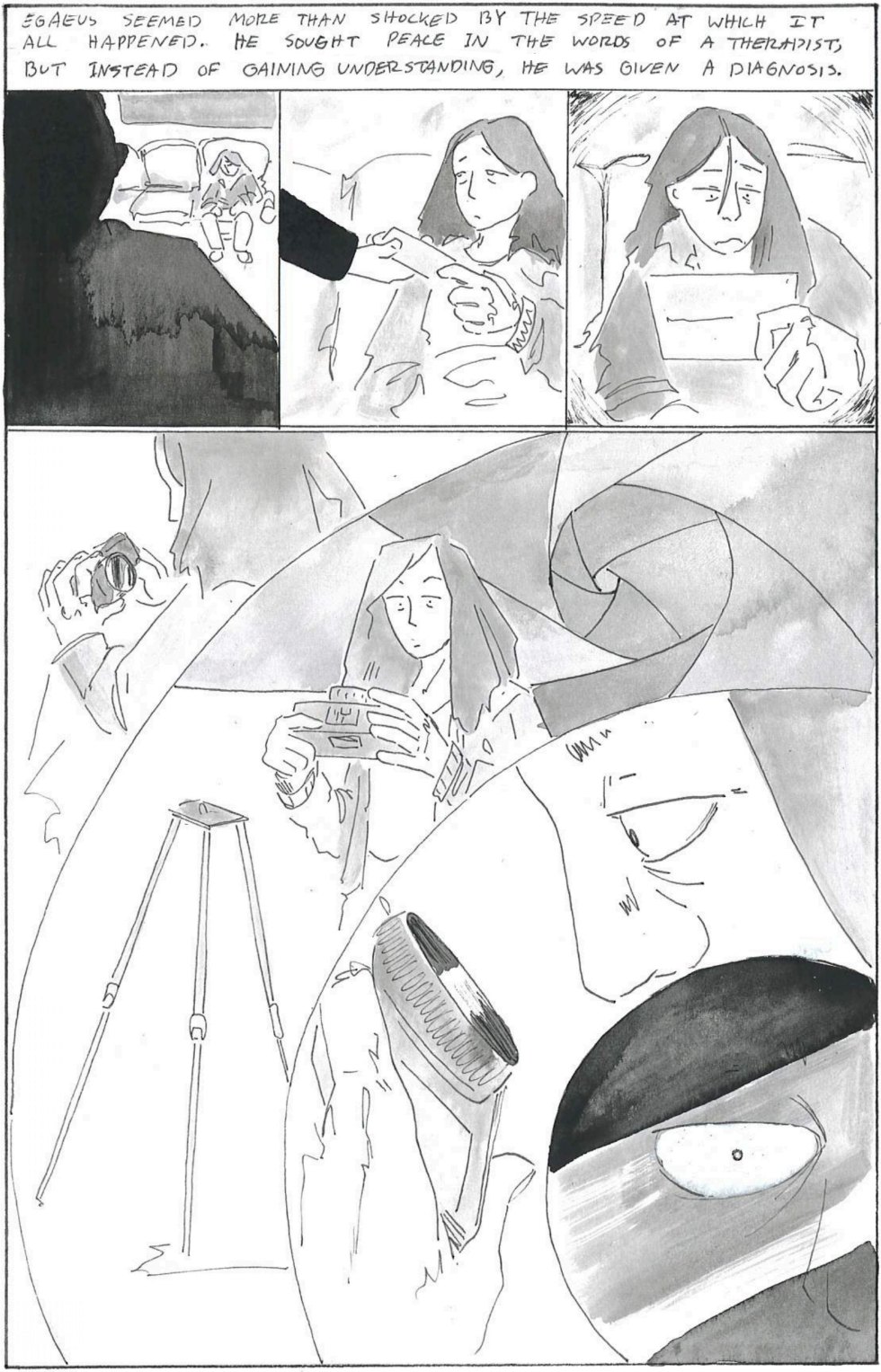
AS THE TWO MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY CLOSEST IN AGE, WE TENDED TOWARDS EACH OTHER AT FAMILY GATHERINGS, TRYING TO FIND REPRIEVE FROM EVERYONE ELSE.

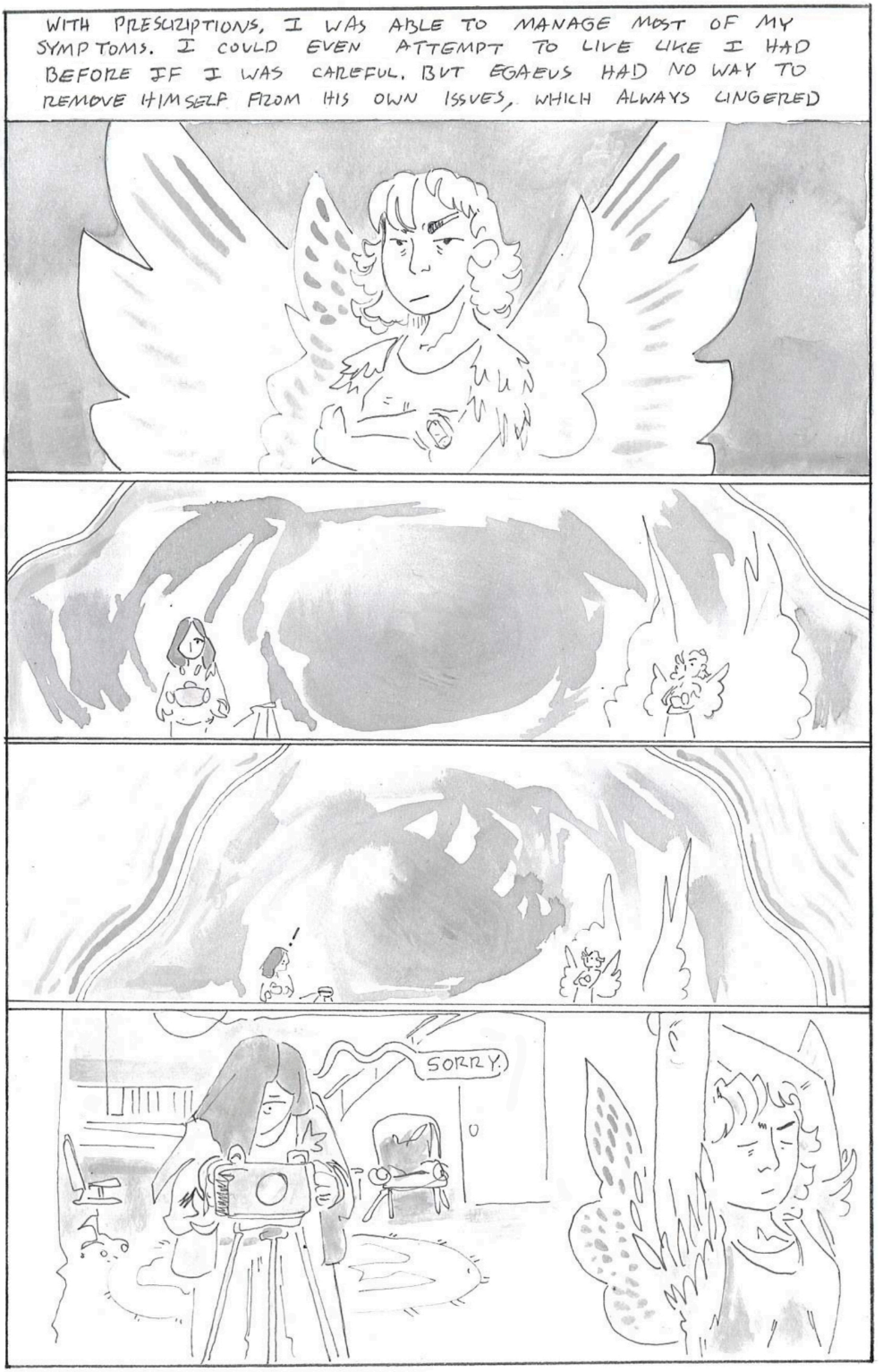


I TOLD HIM ABOUT MY PARENTS' WORRIES, HOW SOMEONE WITH "MY CONDITION" SHOULDN'T PURSUE PUBLIC AMBITIONS.

I TOLD HIM IT DIDN'T MATTER TO ME, THAT I NEEDED TO WORK FOR WHAT I LOVED... SO WHEN HE OFFERED TO HELP ME, I IMMEDIATELY AGREED.

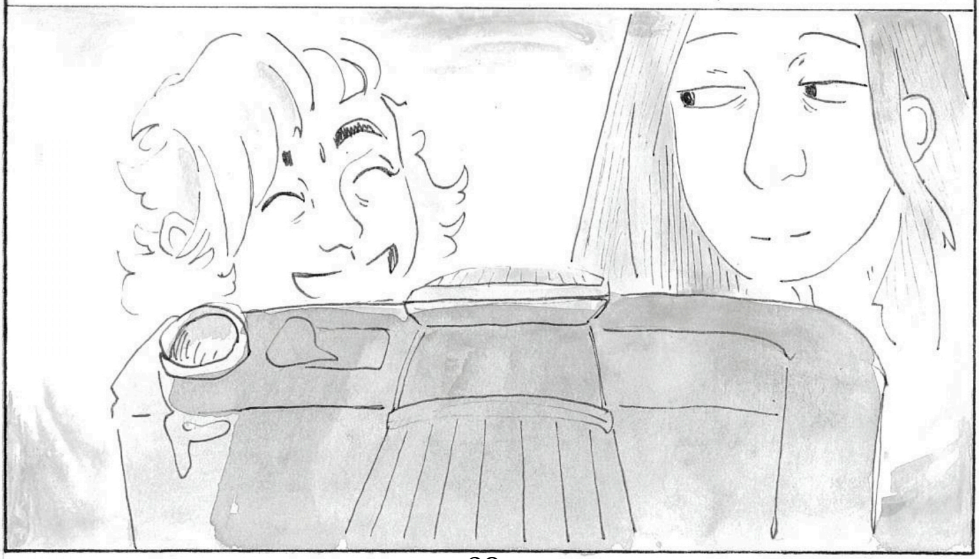
IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE HOW MY PARENTS MADE ME FEEL, LEAVING ME WITH TOO MANY UNFINISHED IDEAS TO BALANCE THE SUCCESSFUL ONES. BUT MEETING EGAEUS...
HE BOLSTERED MY CONFIDENCE IN WHAT WE COULD CREATE. HIS UNWAVERING SUPPORT WAS PROOF THAT MY GOALS WERE WORTHWHILE, EVEN AS MY HEALTH TOOK A SHARP DECLINE.


EGAEUS SEEMED MORE THAN SHOCKED BY THE SPEED AT WHICH IT ALL HAPPENED. HE SOUGHT PEACE IN THE WORDS OF A THERAPIST, BUT INSTEAD OF GAINING UNDERSTANDING, HE WAS GIVEN A DIAGNOSIS.


WITH PRESCRIPTIONS, I WAS ABLE TO MANAGE MOST OF MY SYMPTOMS. I COULD EVEN ATTEMPT TO LIVE LIKE I HAD BEFORE IF I WAS CAREFUL. BUT EGAEUS HAD NO WAY TO REMOVE HIMSELF FROM HIS OWN ISSUES, WHICH ALWAYS LINGERED
!
SORRY.

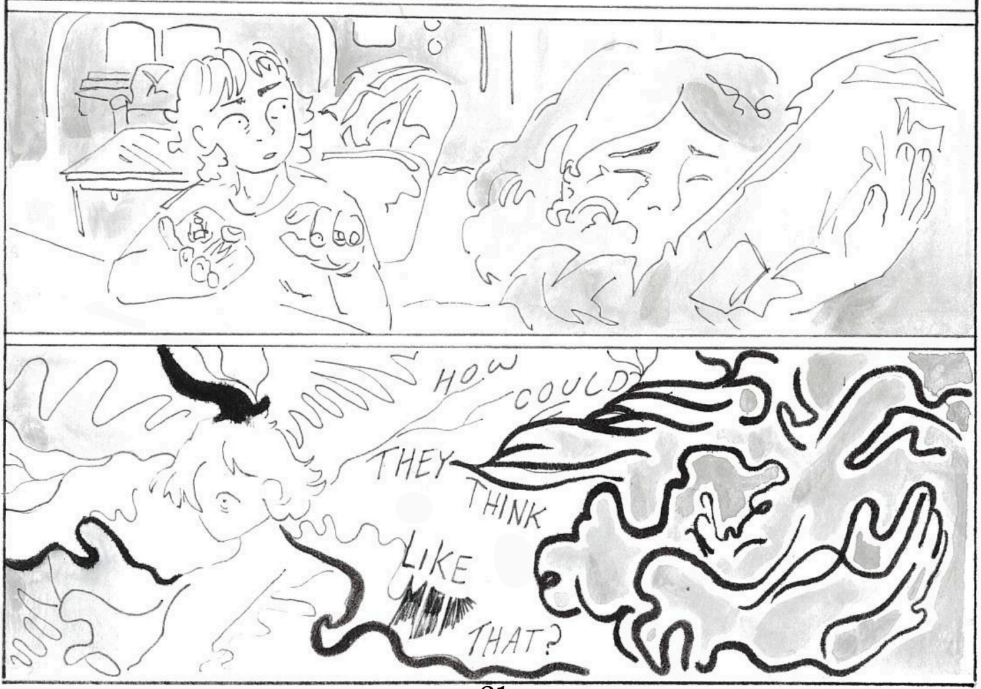
DESPITE ALL THAT HAD HAPPENED, I WAS STILL CONVINCED. I KEPT PUSHING TO GO OUT MORE, MEET MORE PEOPLE, MAKE MORE PROGRESS, NO MATTER HOW I FELT.

EGAEUS BEGAN TO JOIN ME ON MORE PROJECTS AWAY FROM HIS STUDIO, DETERMINED TO HELP ME ACHIEVE MY GOALS.

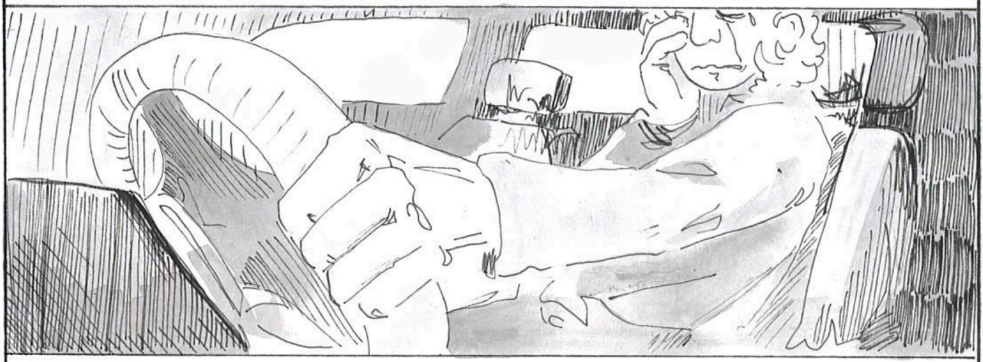


THE WORRY FROM MY PARENTS PUSHED ITS WAY INTO MY EVERY WAKING MOMENT. THEY FRETTED OVER MY HEALTH, MY LIMITS, AND MY DEATH, WHICH THEY SEEMED TO ALREADY BE LIVING IN THE WAKE OF.

EVERY NEW PHOTO I SHARED, NO MATTER HOW BEAUTIFUL, WAS UNABLE TO PULL THEM FROM THE IDEA THAT I WOULD BE GONE TOO SOON.

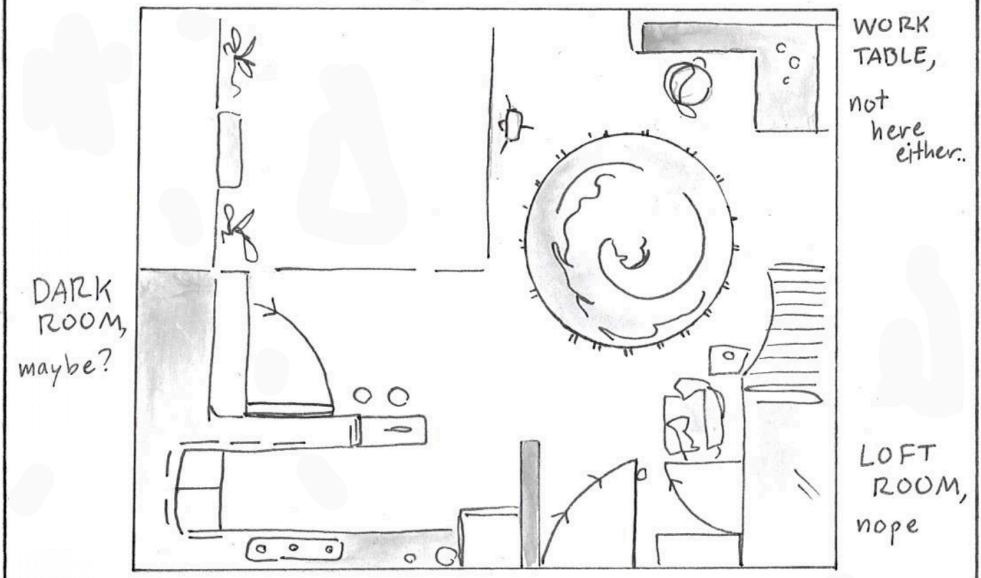


AFTER A PARTICULARLY HORRIBLE FIGHT WITH MY PARENTS, I DECIDED TO VISIT EGAEUS. THOUGH HE WASN'T GOOD AT CONSOLING, HE ALWAYS WANTED TO LISTEN, WHICH WAS ALL I NEEDED.

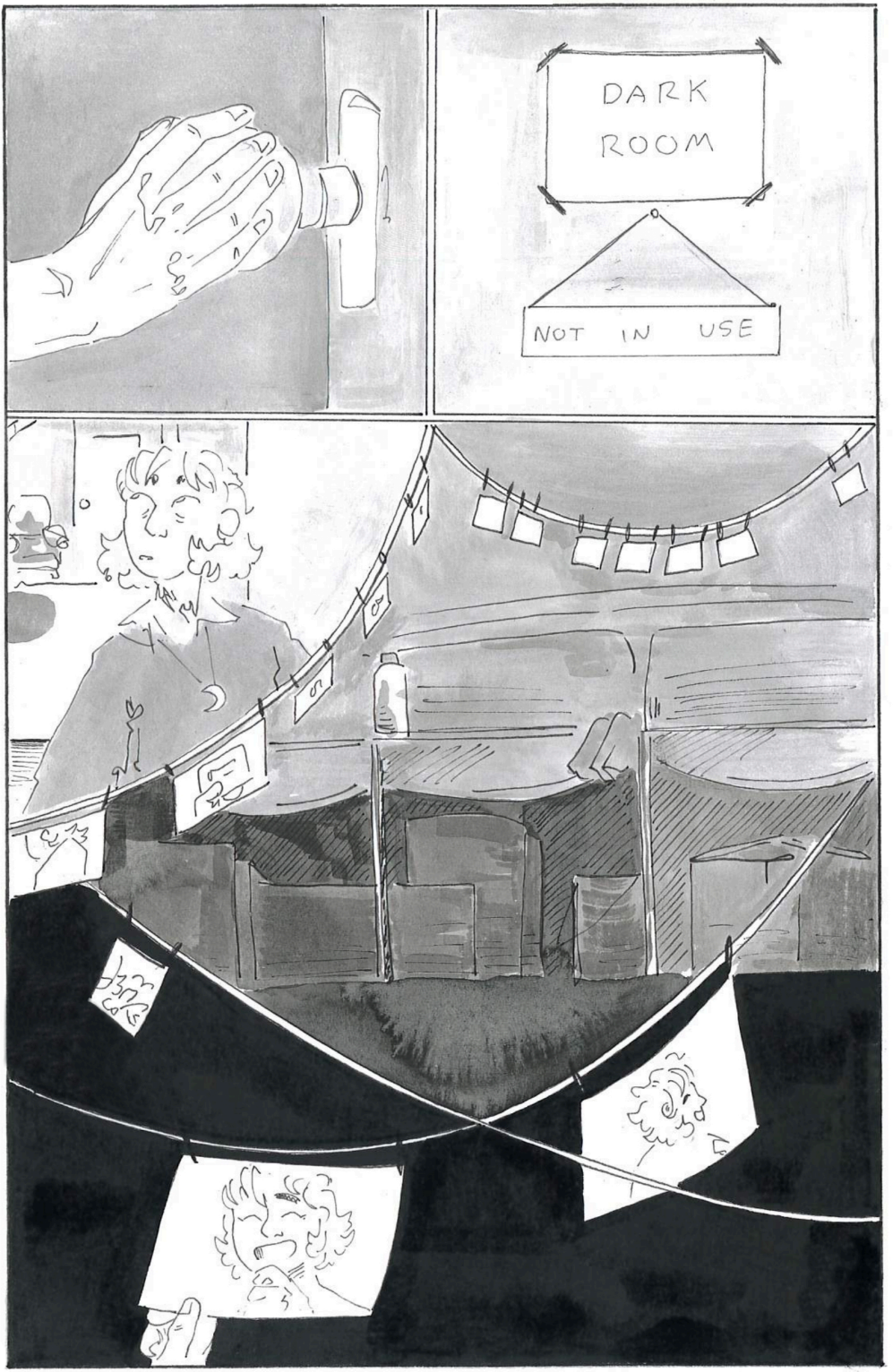


WHEN I ARRIVED AT HIS STUDIO THOUGH, SOMETHING WAS DIFFERENT.

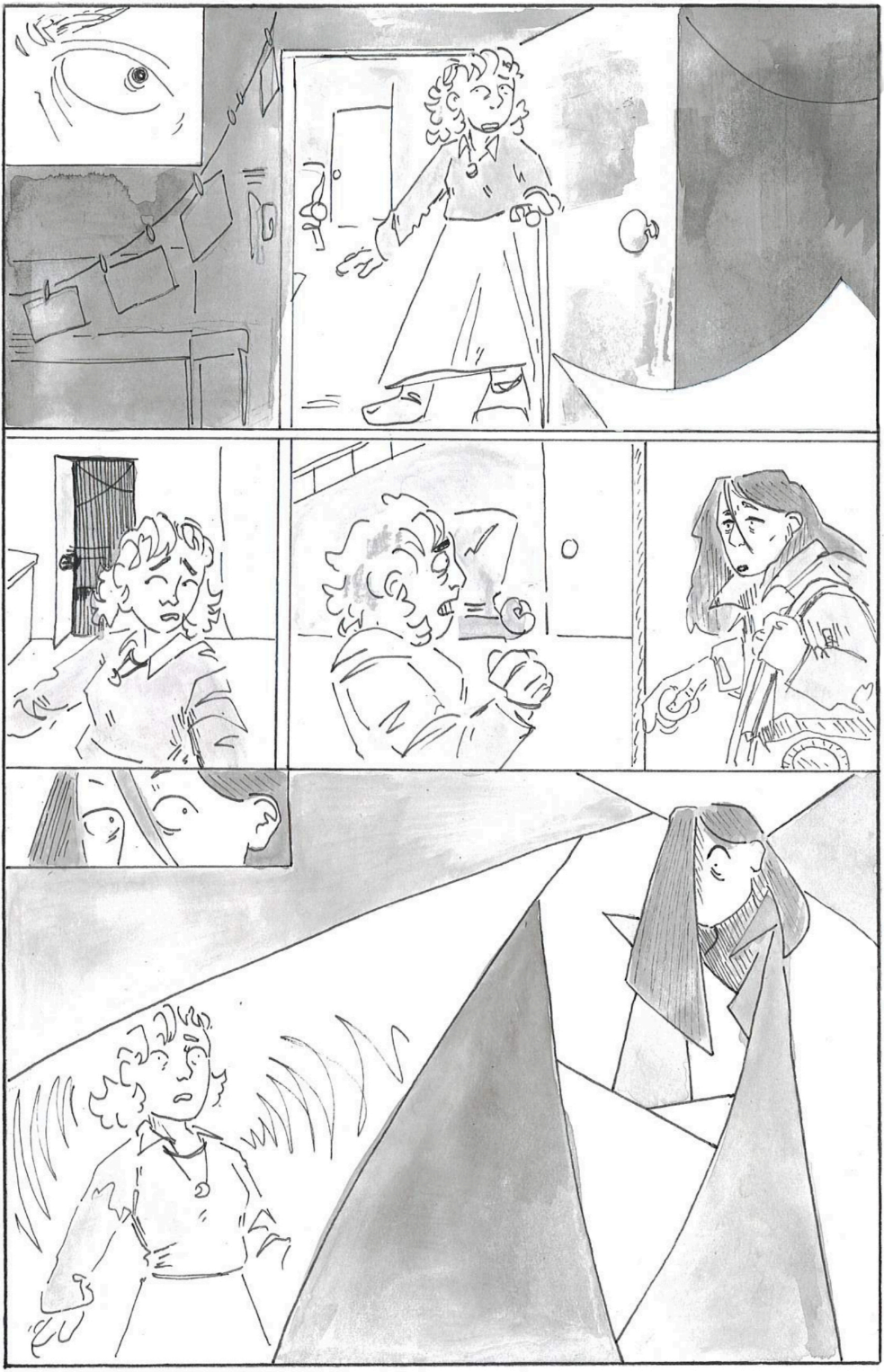
STUDIO, not here



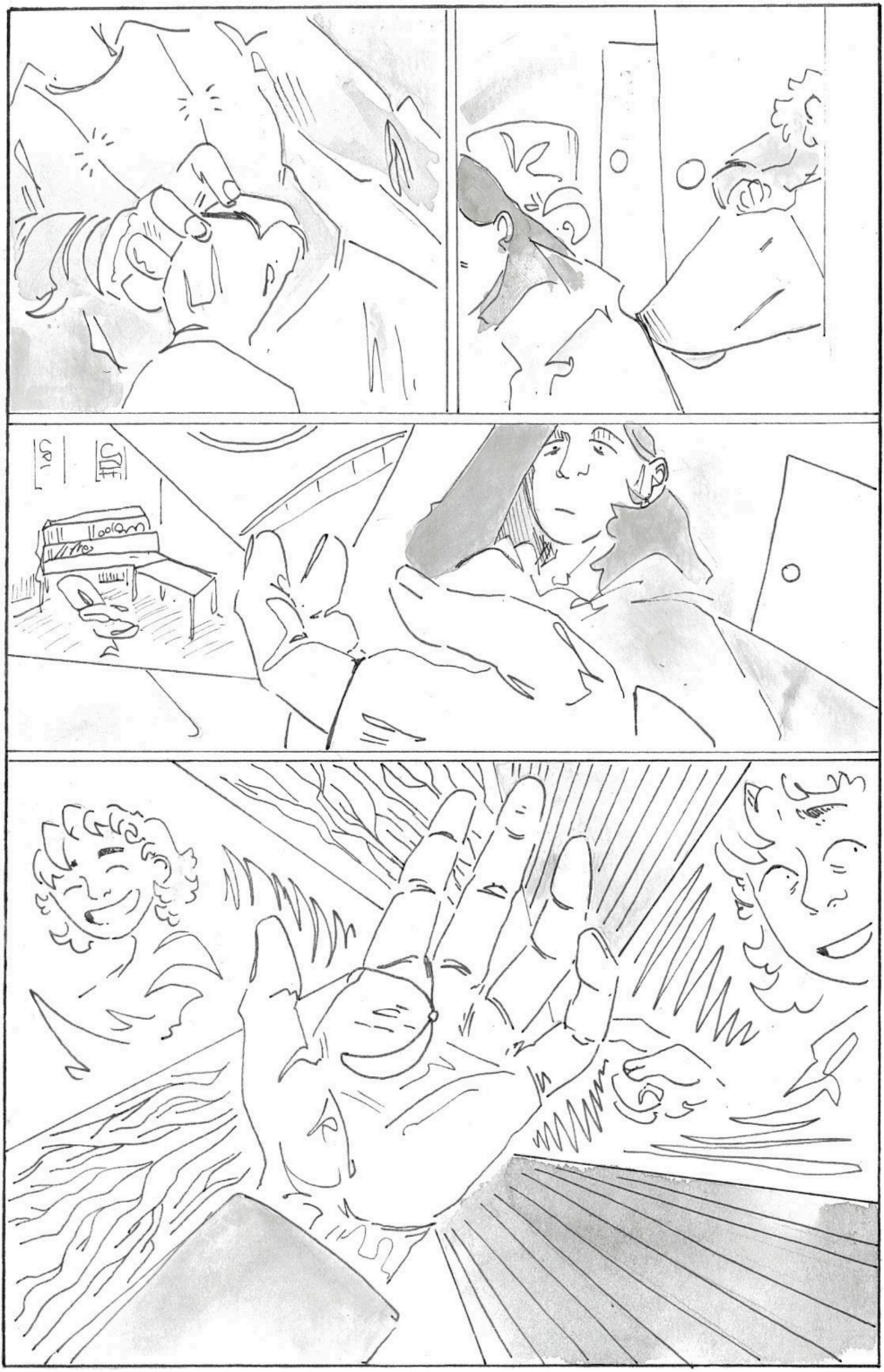
KITCHEN, no...

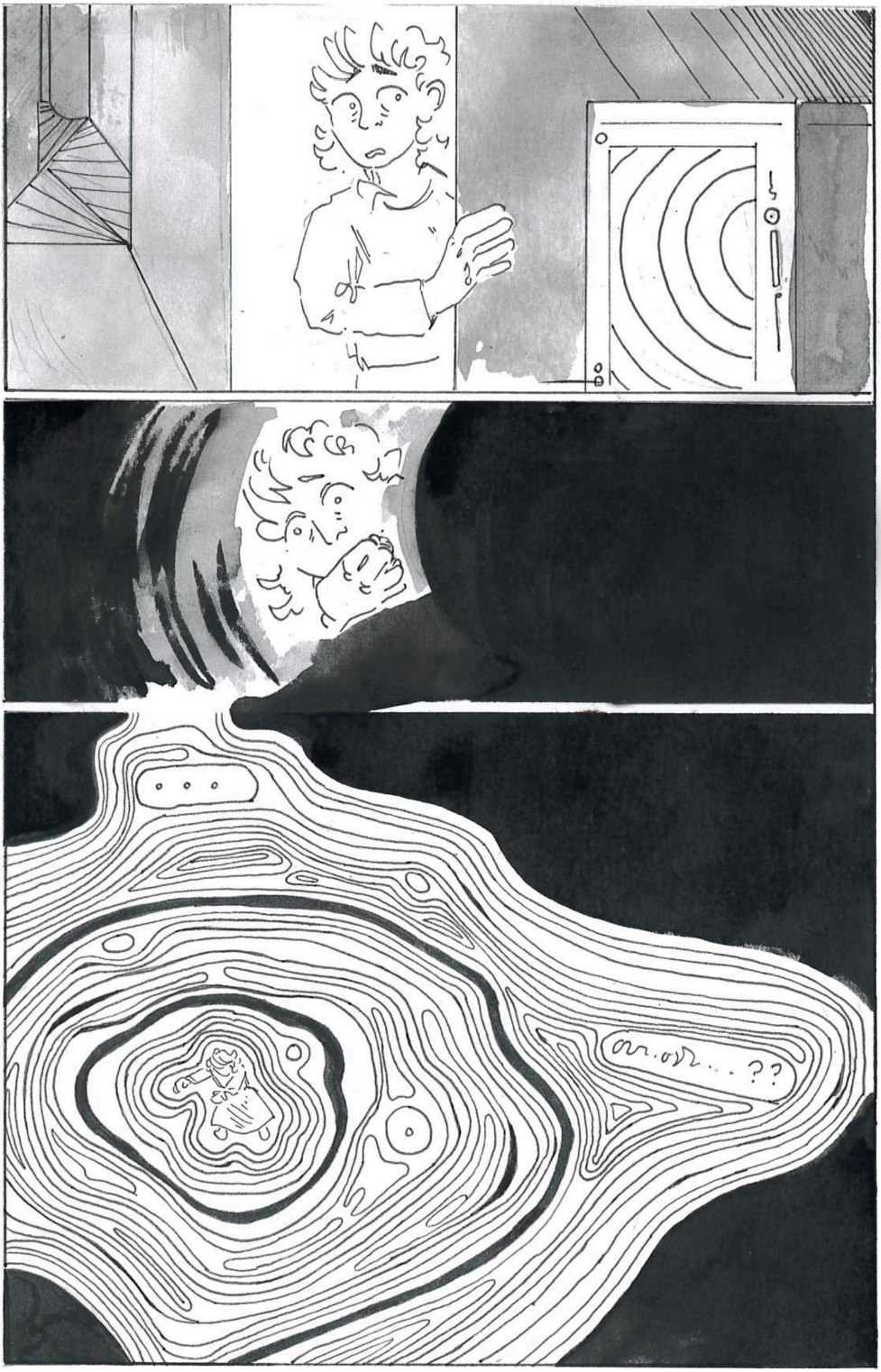

DARK
ROOM
NOT IN USE

I DON'T REMEMBER HIM...
TAKING ANY OF THESE...

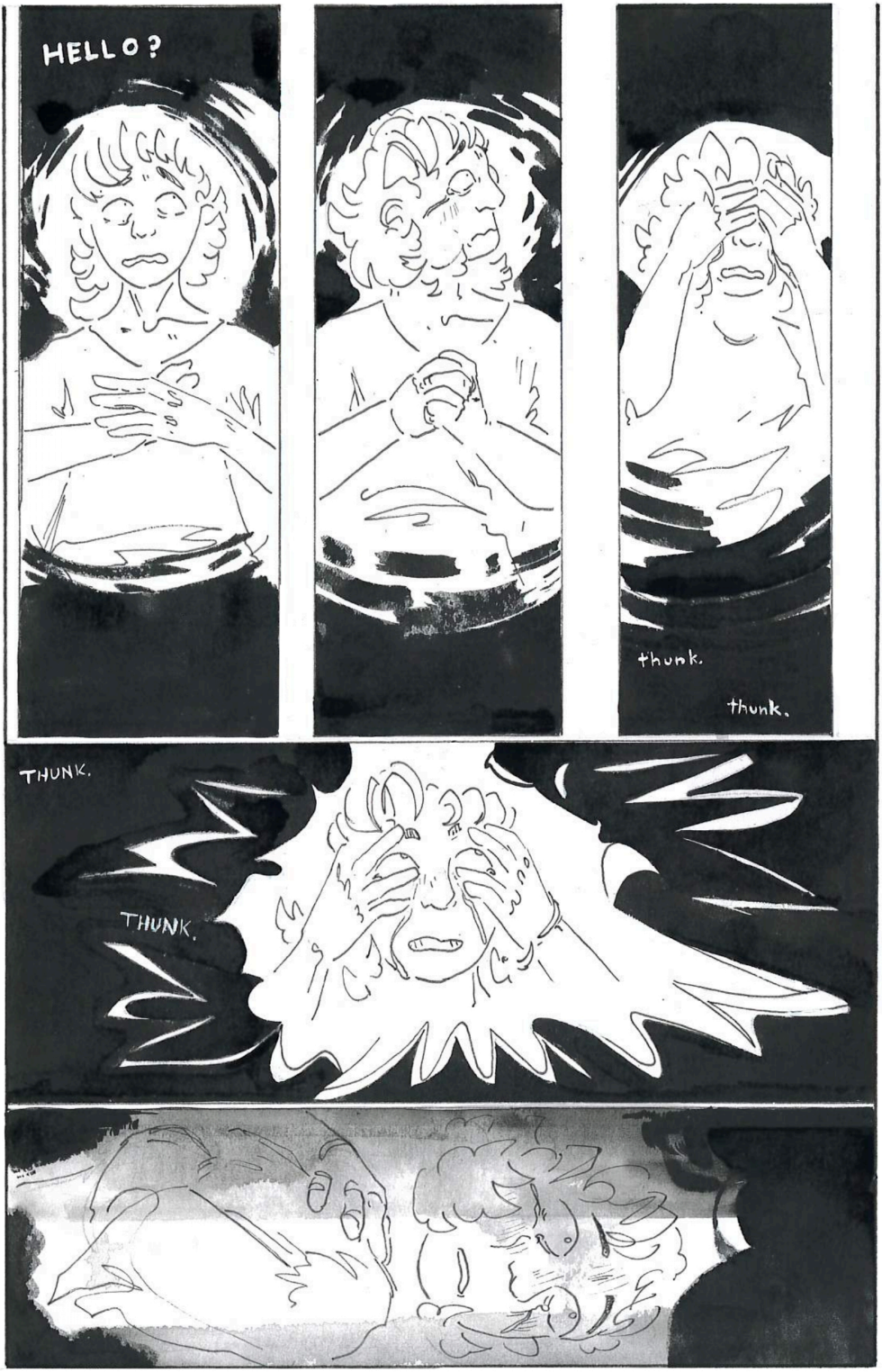


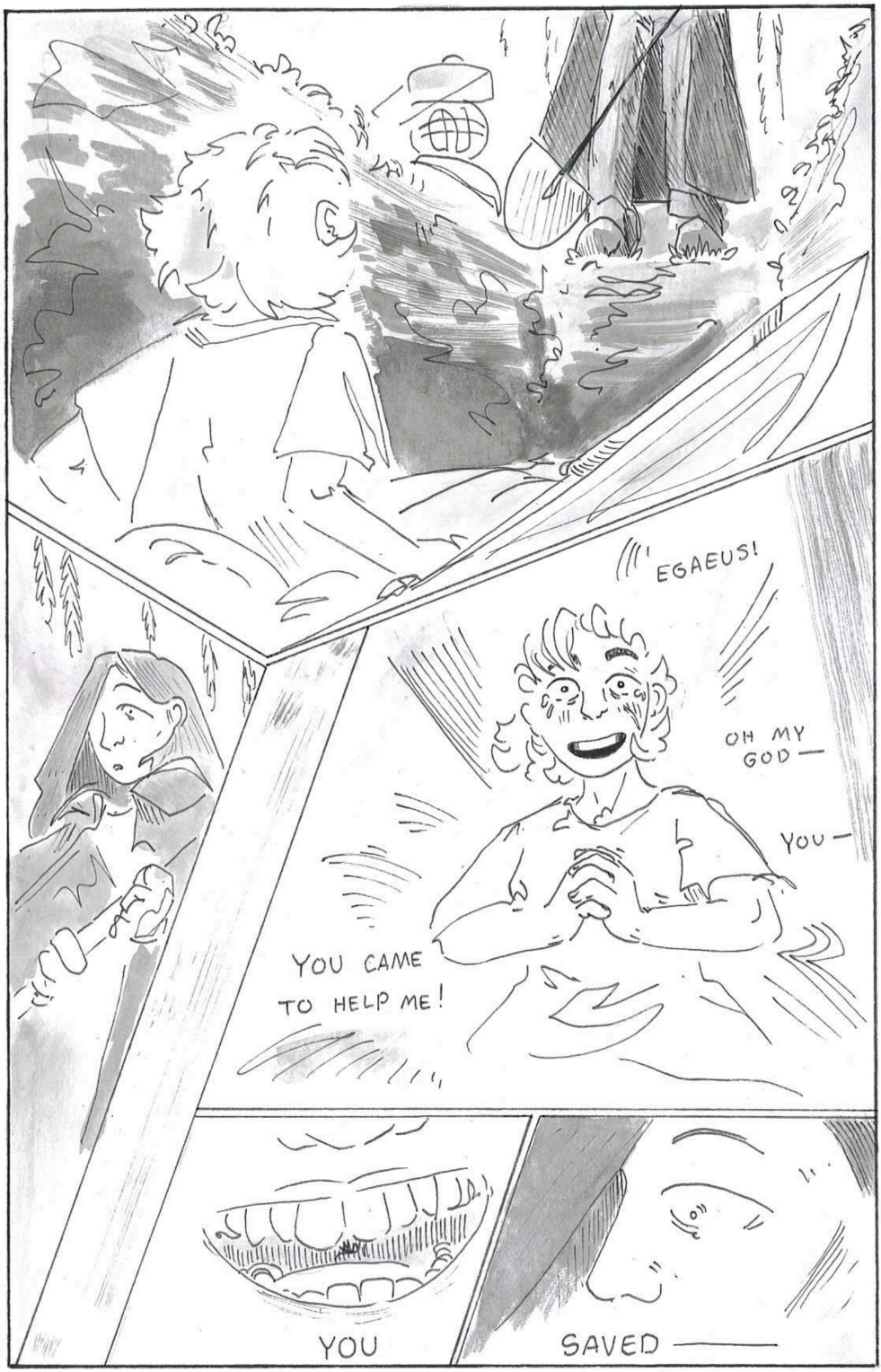
WHERE WERE YOU?
I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE—
SORRY I CAME IN—
I'LL HEAD OUT NOW—

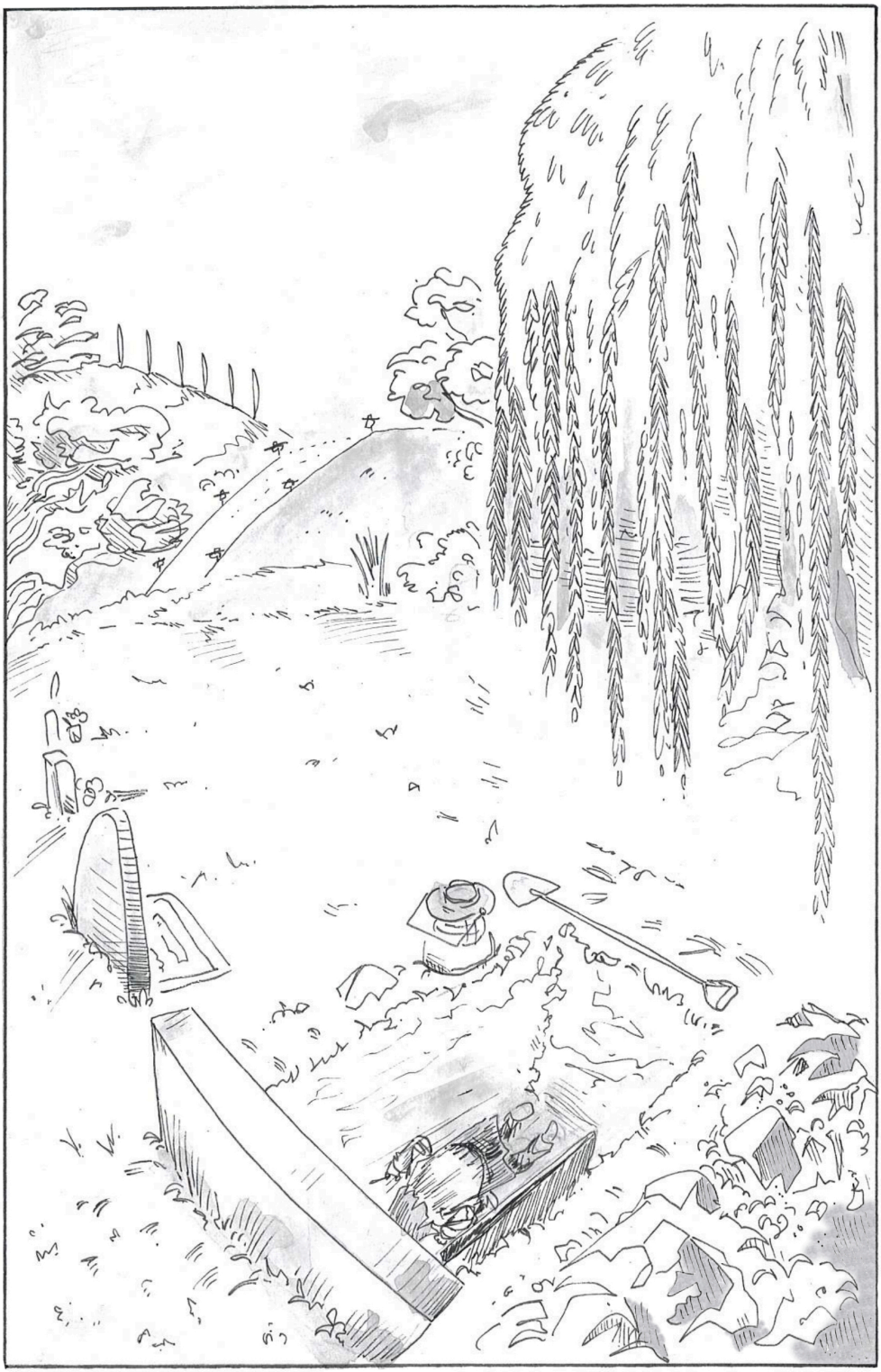


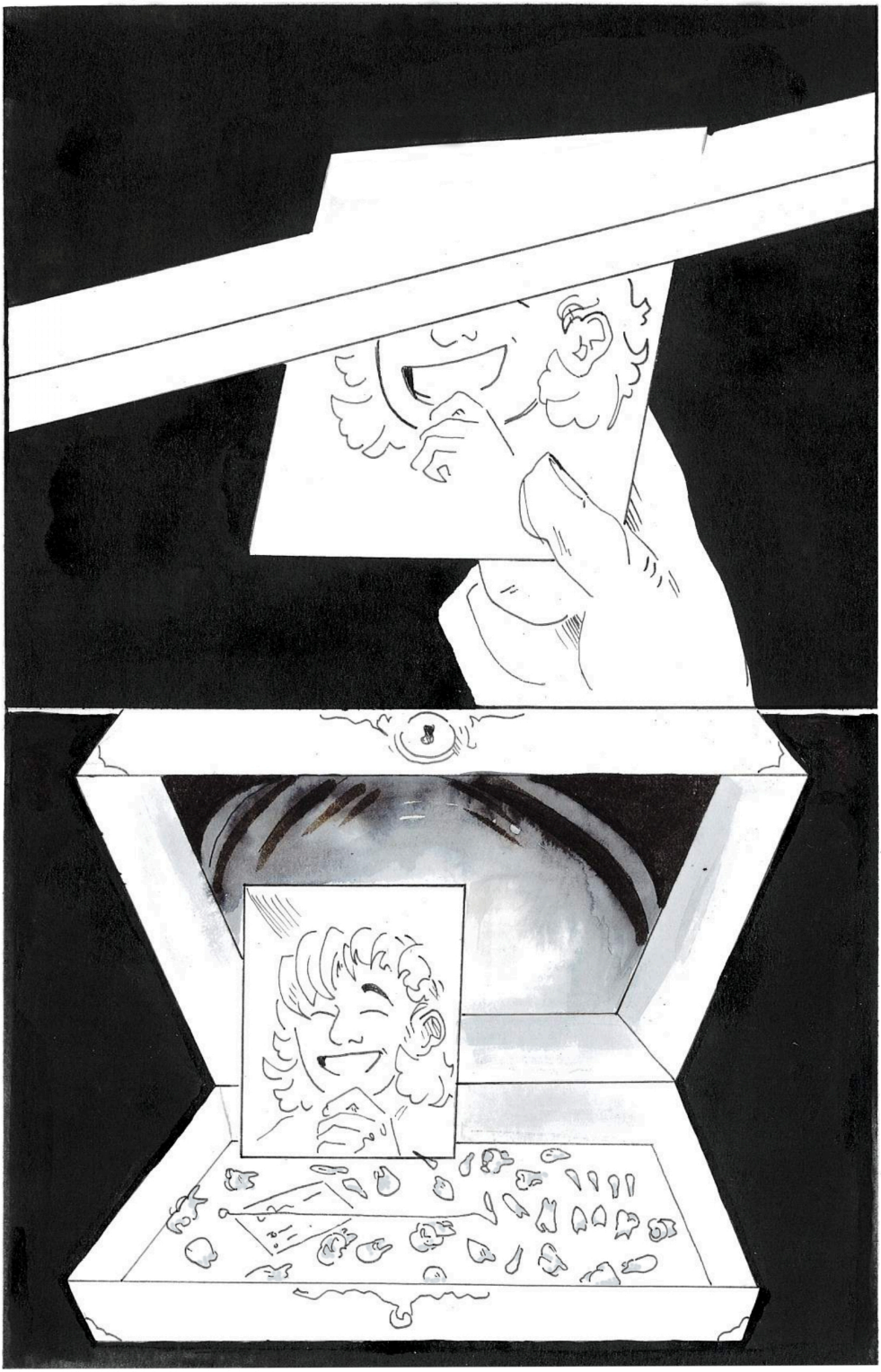


WHAT WAS THAT?
OH GOD, HONEY, CALL 911
YOU, WHAT DID YOU DO?
WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING.
WAIT, DON'T MOVE HER IT MIGHT BE A—
GASP!
NO
NO
NO

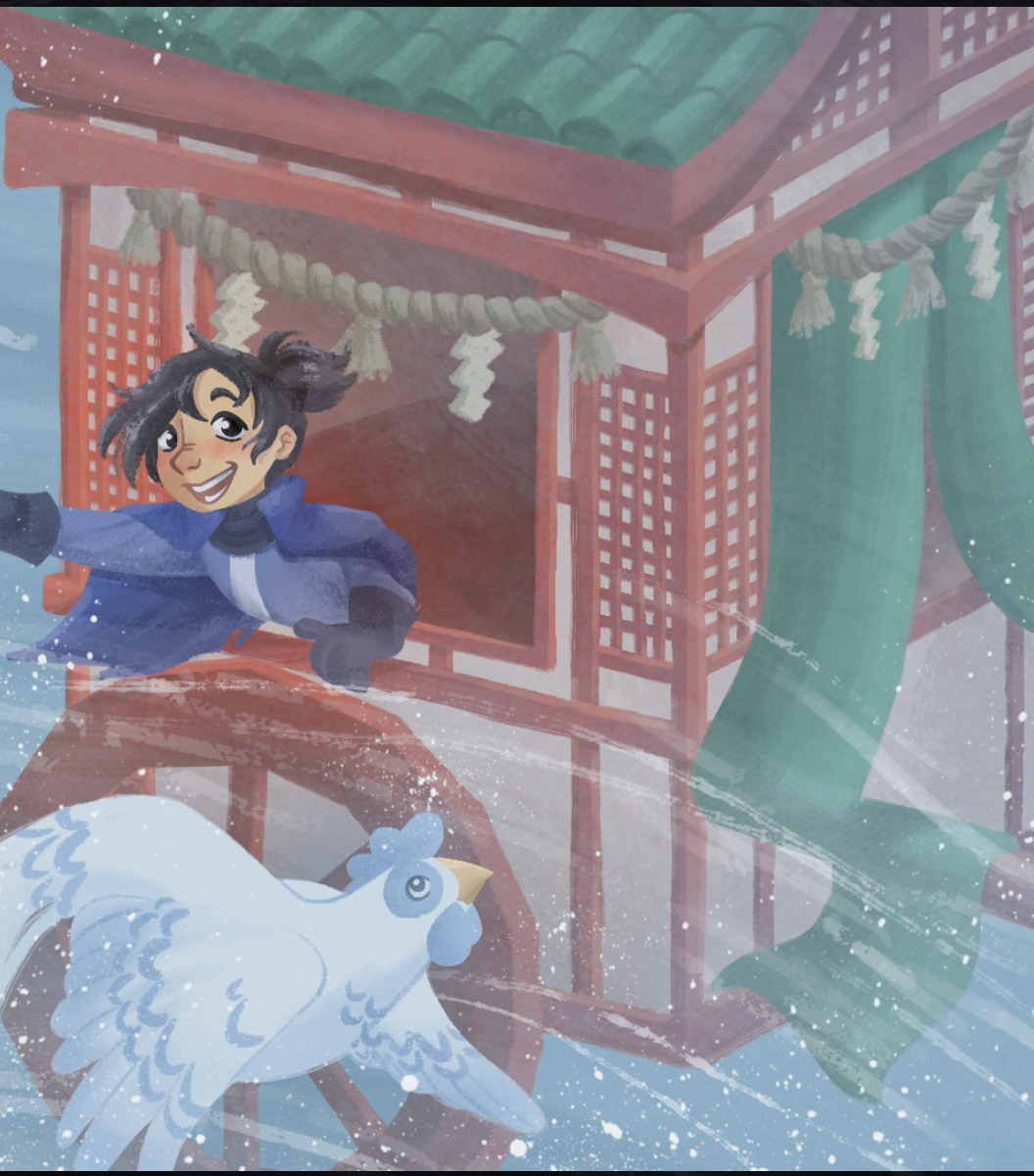

HELLO?
thunk.
thunk.
THUNK.
THUNK.


EGAEUS!
OH MY GOD—
YOU—
YOU CAME TO HELP ME!
YOU
SAVED——





The snow-flakes grew bigger and bigger, till at last they looked like ***large white hens***; suddenly they parted, the big sledge pulled up, and the person who was driving in it rose. The fur and the cap were all of snow: it was a lady, tall and slender, shining white—***the Snow Queen***.

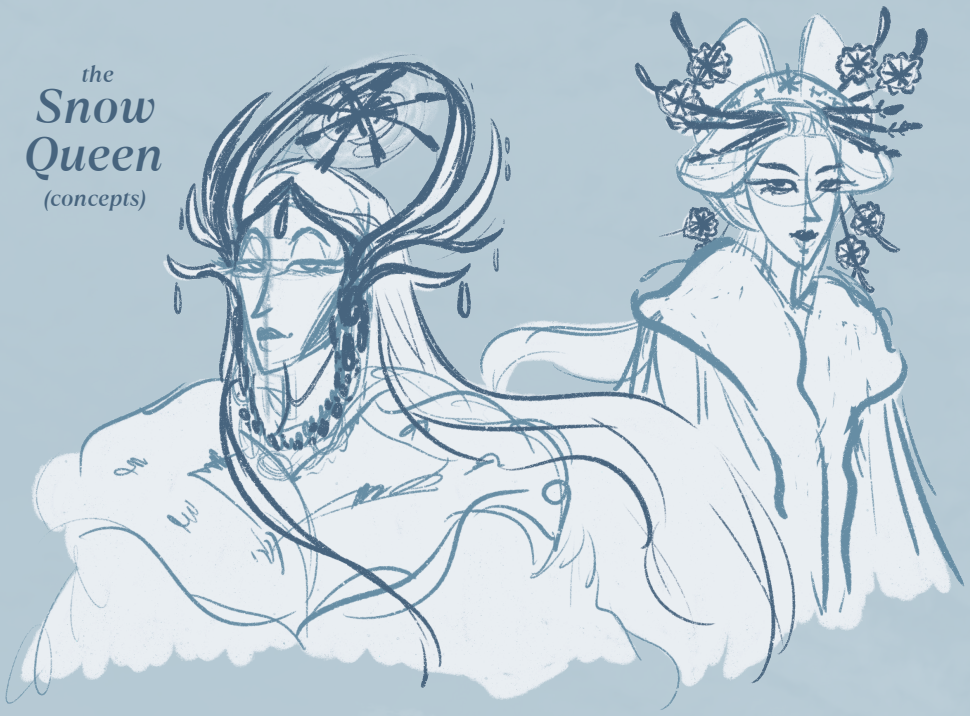


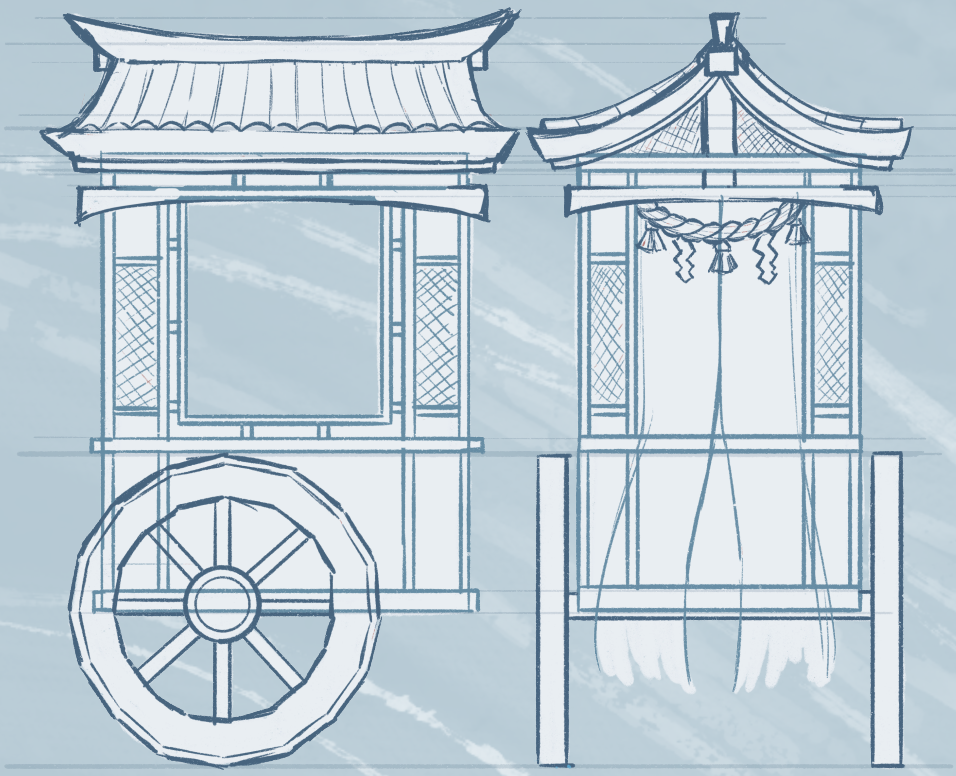
"My sledge! Don't leave my sledge behind!" that was the first thing he remembered: so it was tied on to one of the white hens, which flew after them with the sledge on its back. Once more the Snow Queen kissed Kai, and he had forgotten little Gerda and grandmother and ***everyone at home***.

The Snow Queen by Hans Christian Anderson is the tale of a girl named Gerda who braves the vast, supernatural wilderness in search of her best friend, Kai, who has been taken by an evil enchantress. Through the power of love, perserverence, and kindness, Gerda is able to overcome the temptations in her path and free Kai from his listless state in the icy palace, restoring his sense of goodness.

While the story has roots in Denmark, this rendition is inspired by traditional Japanese folklore and incorporates fashion trends, architecture, and spiritual practices of the Edo Period. Kai is portrayed with a gappa cape, tobi pants, suneate shin guards, and a kimono top. Elements from Shinto shrines were also integrated into the Snow Queen's carriage to symbolize Kai's journey from the regular world to the spiritual realm.

the
Snow Queen
(concepts)





We would like to extend our gratitude and love for the source material that was adapted for this edition of The Eversprawling Castle, including:

Orpheus and Eurydice

Pygmalion

Sleeping Beauty

Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

Frankenstein by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Berenice by Edgar Allan Poe

The Snow Queen by Hans Christian Andersen

This zine was crafted by humans for a human audience. No artificial intelligence, LLMs, or other technologies used to imitate creativity were used in the making of this project.

Creator Biographies

nhi (meownhi.carrd.co)
editor & founder

nhi is a Vietnamese American artist and writer with an attraction to stories about catharsis. nhi longs to become a life-long storyteller for either genre or literary fiction, dealing with themes about American culture, LGBTQ+ experiences, and catholic love. As a comic aficionado, nhi wants to live life in the gutter.

Stephanie Rose Hold (stephanierosehold.carrd.co)
editor & founder

Stephanie Rose Hold is a poet and fiction writer whose work has been published by Fifth Wheel Press and Beyond Words Literary Magazine. Her ongoing short fiction series can be found at "offallyconvenient" on Tumblr. When she isn't stitching together monsters, she's writing about her scattered memories and distant dreams.

Sophie Hold

Sophie Hold enjoys working in a variety of physical mediums, including painting, photography, and model building in an effort to express herself and connect with the world around her. Her work has been previously published on her walls and shelves, so she is very excited to make her zine debut!

M. Ellis King

M. Ellis King is a lover of stories in all forms. An aspiring writer, their favorite genres are sci-fi and fantasy. When they aren't doomscrolling on Tumblr, they can be found watercolor painting, reading comics, and watching awful movies.

Art McClure (@waxworx on Tumblr and waxbones.neocities.org/portfolio)

Art McClure is a multidisciplinary artist and concept designer with experience in traditional “pen and pencil” works, model making, and historically accurate manuscript recreation. They have a particular passion for horror, inspired by the tactile designs of artists such as Phil Tippett and Q Hayashida. Their work also steps into the high fantasy genre, utilizing their deep appreciation of historical garments. In their spare time, Art can be found playing indie horror games, making modular origami, and practicing the longsword.

Sarah Shimabukuro (@Lizzydrawz on Instagram and shimiartz.wixsite.com/portfolio)

Sarah Shimabukuro is a graphic designer and illustrator based in Southern California. Although she is currently employed as a designer and print shop operator, she is an aspiring character designer and children’s book illustrator who has a passion for the entertainment industry. When she isn’t doing art, she is playing video games with friends, watching films, and cuddling with her pets.

The Eversprawling Castle is a bi-annual zine created by nhi and Stephanie Rose Hold for their friends to collaborate and showcase their original art and writing, bringing a new theme to life in each issue.

To learn more about future issues, follow us on social media:

@TheEversprawlingCastle on Tumblr
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@evrsprwl_castle on Twitter
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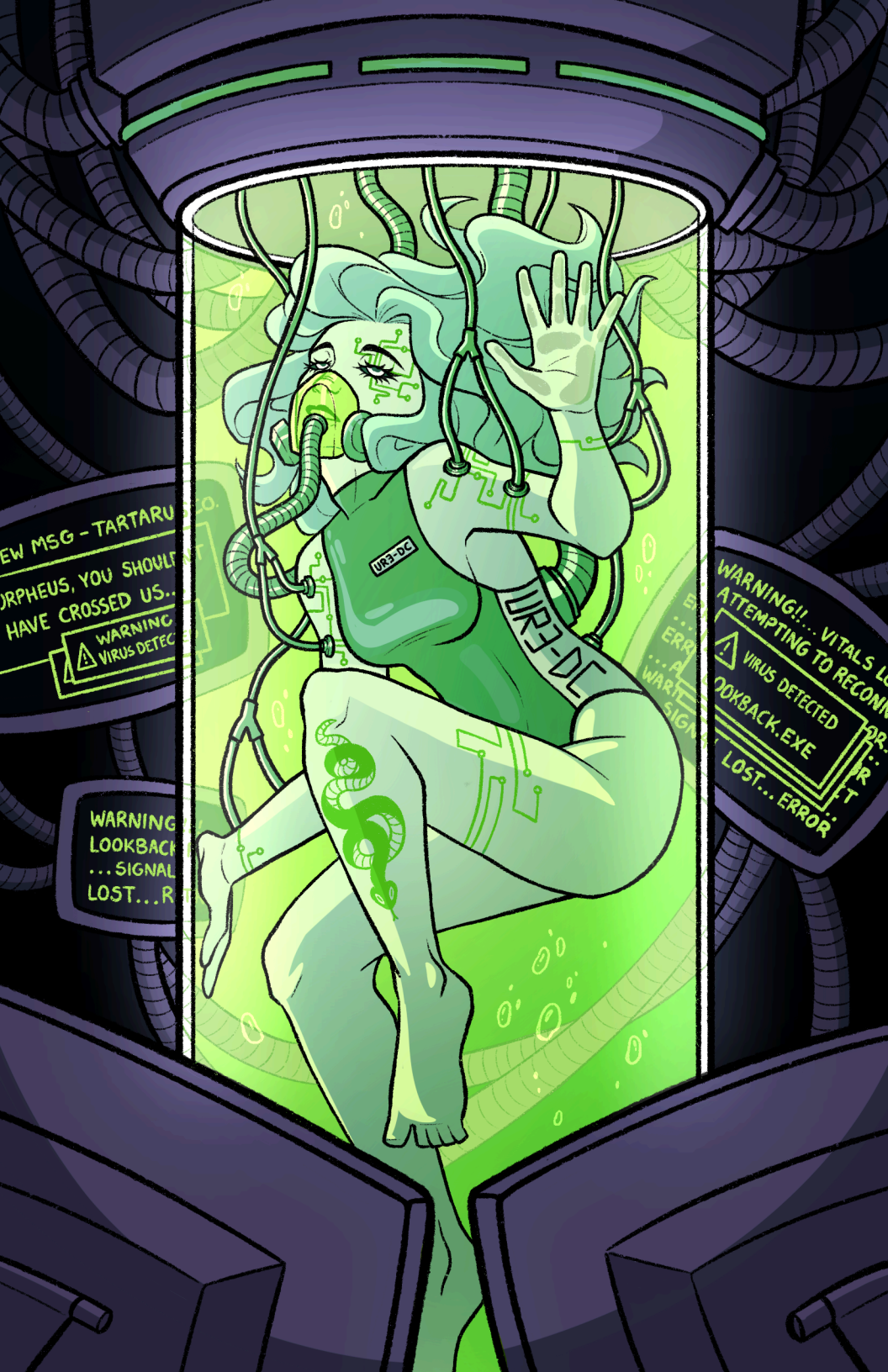
For all inquiries: eversprawlingcastle@gmail.com

THE
EVERSPRAWLING
CASTLE

Eurydice
by Sarah Shimabukuro


EW MSG - TARTARU
RPHEUS, YOU SHOULD
HAVE CROSSED US..
WARNING
VIRUS DETEC
WARNING
LOOKBACK
...SIGNAL
LOST...R
UR3-DC
WARNING!!... VITALS L
ATTEMPTING TO RECONN
VIRUS DETECTED
OOKBACK.EXE
LOST... ERROR